

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

## THE FRENCH ACADEMY.

BY JOHN READE.

At the end of the sixteenth century a poet named J. Antoine Baif, a friend of Ronsard, founded in a house in des Fosses-Saint Victor Street, Paris, a society of wits and musicians, whose chief object was the grammatical study of language and its pronunciation. Concerts were given there which attracted a good number of young noblemen and gentlemen. In 1570 Charles IX. granted to this society letters patent in which he declared that in order that the said society may be patronized and honoured by the greatest persons in the land, he was desirous of becoming a protector and member of it. The Parliament, supported by the Bishop of Paris and the University, after having strongly opposed the enregistering of these letters, was at length obliged to yield. Henry III., the successor of Charles IX., took the Academy under his protection, but the death of Baif and the troubles of the League hastened the downfall of the establishment. That it had already acquired some importance may be learned by the following passage from a manuscript of G. Colletet:

"Amadis de Jamyn delivered some philosophic discourses before Henry III., in the Academy of Antoine Baif, established in the vicinity of the Faubourg Saint Marcel. For I know, by tradition, that Amadis de Jamyn belonged to this celebrated society, of which Gui de Pibrac, Pierre de Ronsard, Philippe Desportes, Jacques-Davy Duperron, and several others of the most excellent minds of the age, were members. I once saw a manuscript book of the institution of this noble and famous Academy, from which it appeared that the good King, Henry III., and the Duke of Guise and most of the lords and ladies of the Court, had given their support to the Academy, which, however, came to an end during the troubles and confusions of the civil wars of the kingdom. The kings, the princes, the noblemen and all the *gens* who composed this celebrated body, had all signed their names in this book, which was the first plan of this noble institution, and which promised wonders both for science and literature."

In the reign of Louis XIII., the project of the Academy was revived. In 1612 David Rivault published a pamphlet in which the author proposed to establish an Academy which should embrace all the sciences except theology.

About the year 1630, Valentin Conrart, a Privy Counsellor, formed a society of literary men, which met at his own house. Among its members were Godeau, Gombault, Chapelain, Giry, Habert, the Abbé de Cérisy, and Serisay de Malleville. Introduced to this society by Malleville, Farci, in his turn, introduced Desmarest and the Abbé Bois-Robert; the latter, in turn, spoke of it to his patron, the Cardinal Richelieu, who in 1634, offered his protection to the members of the Academy and proposed to constitute it a public society. After some resistance on the part of de Cérisy, de Malleville, and several others, who probably foresaw the bad results of Court patronage on a literary association, the offer of his Eminence was respectfully accepted.

The society, reconstituted under the direction of Richelieu, took the title of "The French Academy." Hitherto it had been variously designated the "Académie de Beaux-Esprits," the "Académie de Eloquence," and the "Académie Eminent." In a discourse, in which its objects were announced, it was said: "That our language, already more perfect than any other of the living languages, might at last succeed the Latin, as the Latin had succeeded the Greek, if more care were taken in its use than had hitherto been done; that the duties of academicians would be to cleanse the language from the foulness which it had contracted in the mouths of the people, in the crowds of the places in the impurities of the law-courts, by the abuses of ignorant courtiers, by the abuses of those who corrupt it in writing, or of those who speak properly when they speak *ex cathedra*, but, at other times, improperly."

The letters patent for the foundation of the Academy were signed on the 2nd of January, 1635. The great seal was affixed; and soon after, Richelieu, to whom the King had granted full power, signed the statutes, only effecting the article which ordered that each academician should promise "to revere the virtue and the memory of the lord patron (himself)."

The registration of the letters patent met with opposition from the Parliament, and did not take place for two years and a half afterwards.

Scarcely had the Academy received its definitive constitution than it became the butt of all kinds of epigrams and witticisms. It was said, *in rithy*, that Richelieu was to endow each of the forty members with £2,000 income, by means of £50,000 intended for the cleaning of the streets.

The Academy soon became a tool in the hands of Richelieu. One of its first acts of deference to his Eminence was the condemnation of Corneille's famous *Cid*.

Under Louis XIV. the Academy was more regularly constituted. His gift, also, of six hundred volumes was the beginning of the present library of the institution. Under him, too, the title of academicians began to be coveted by others than literary personages. Princes, peers, cardinals, ministers, councillors of state, competed for the honour with historians, poets, philosophers and orators. The Academy gained in renown, but lost in independence. A place in its ranks became, not the reward of literary merit, but a mark of favour to men of high position and to foreigners whom the King delighted to honour. One person was made an academician because he had successfully negotiated a marriage of state. On the death of Pierre Corneille, the Duke of Maine, then only fourteen years of age, took a fancy to succeed him. Ruvigny, who was then President, was about to reply to the Duke's request that, even if there were no vacant chair, there was not an academician among them but would have been delighted (ravi) to make one for him, when the King, struck with the absurdity of the proceedings, refused to ratify the election of the prince. So, no thanks to the Academy if Thomas Corneille replaced his distinguished brother. Soubère, a *littérateur* below medio-

crity, Malet, whose sole claim was a wretched ode, took their places in the illustrious assembly.

The Academy offered a chair to Maréchal Saxe. In his reply was the following passage:—"Il se vult me fère de la *Cadémie*, cela m'irait come une bage à un chas!" The spelling of this great warrior is certainly peculiar! He shone in the *Campus Martius* rather than in the *Athenæum*.

It was not without reason that Voltaire defined the Academy as "a body into which they receive persons of title, men in place, lawyers, physicians, and *even men of letters*."

The Academy sometimes shewed its subserviency to the powers that were by exclusions as well as admissions. The Abbé de Saint-Pierre was banished, at the instigation of Cardinal de Polignac, for having rather severely judged some acts of the government of Louis XIV. Condorcet was kept out of the Academy for years for having refused to eulogize the Duke of Vrillière. On account of this spirit of servility the Academy had fallen so low in public opinion at the close of the last century that it was said that Voltaire, at his death, had taken away all the genius, and Fénémaigne all the honesty, from French literature.

In his admission to the Academy in 1640, Olivier Patru delivered an address of thanks which so pleased his confrères that, some time after, the ceremony became obligatory. In the case of some distinguished persons, however, it was dispensed with.

This obligation of making a speech in public deterred the timid Rochefoucauld from presenting himself before the Academy. The Maréchal de Richelieu was bolder. In the manuscript of the discourse which he pronounced before the Academy, there is abundance of orthographical mistakes. The same Richelieu, when he was President of the Academy, requested Voltaire to compose him a complimentary speech to be delivered before the King. Copies of this speech having been circulated among the members, as Richelieu uttered a phrase, many persons pronounced half aloud the phrase following.

These adulatory speeches were, from the first, subjects of public ridicule. One of the presidents of the Academy compared them to those solemn masses where the celebrant, after having first cursed all the worshippers, ends by being in turn cursed himself.

The noble members of the Academy sometimes made the distance rudely felt between a great lord and a plebeian. The Bishop of Noyon, Clermont-Tonnerre, disdained in his reception address to praise his predecessor, Barbier d'Ancourt. He was obliged, however, to insert in his printed speech the words of praise which his aristocratic prejudice would not allow him to utter.

It may be easily imagined that the original object of the Academy—the ornament, embellishment and augmentation of the French language—was often forgotten. Tradition has kept the memory of a phrase of 180 words in an address of the Abbé Hardion. An Academician named Sédaine, who wrote equally badly in verse and prose, was so delighted with the address of a new member, that at its conclusion, he threw himself on his neck and cried out with gushing simplicity: "Ah, Sir! for twenty years I have been writing nonsense, but I have never said anything equal to that!"

## OVER LEGISLATION.

(From Punch.)

The following Notices of Motion for leave to bring in Bills, have been given for the next Session of Parliament:—

A Bill to put an end to the deleterious habit, by Mothers, of addressing nonsensical words to infants and young children, and for enabling that any Mother, speaking to her child, shall use the language of grown-up people.

A Bill for preventing all persons leaving churches, or other places of worship, from commencing secular talk until they shall be at least fifty yards from such edifice.

A Bill for prohibiting any persons who may attend a musical or theatrical entertainment, from speaking to one another except in whispers, or between the acts.

A Bill for preventing any person from eating an orange in a street or other place of public passage, unless he shall have previously, in the presence of a police-constable, peeled the said orange, and deposited the peel in a receptacle to be provided by the rate-payers of the locality.

A Bill to prohibit any person from suddenly stepping in the street to look in at a shop-window, and thus interfering with the progress of other passengers.

A Bill for preventing acquaintances or others from standing to talk in the street, to the hindrance of the public, and for providing recesses at various points where persons desirous of conversation may enjoy it without interference with the public interest.

A Bill forbidding all persons to sneeze loudly in any public thoroughfare where there is danger of terrifying horses.

A Bill preventing persons from kindling cigars on the seashore, lest the pilots of vessels should be deceived by the lights, and marine property be endangered.

A Bill prohibiting any person from offering a bet upon any subject whatever, without a Magistrate's certificate that the wager is not contrary to morality, and without entering into security to liquidate the said wager when decided.

A Bill for checking the employment of objectionable language, and for imposing fines on the use of any Pagan oaths, as "By Jove!" of any exaggerations or untruths, as "I have not seen you for an age!" "You have been a month on the errand!" and of all suggestions of comparison between an event and the Principle of Evil, as, "It rained like the Devil."

A Bill for making it unlawful to use false and conventional terminations to letters, and for abolishing the phrases, "Your obedient humble servant," and the like, but with provisions that no restriction shall apply to letters between persons entitled to exchange affectionate language.

A Bill for prohibiting gutter-children from blowing tin whistles, which make a distressingly monotonous noise, and for sending offenders to the Royal Academy of Music, for instruction in better instruments.

A Bill providing for a quarterly return, from every household, of the general behaviour of each member of his household, with special accounts of any irregularities, distinguishing them under the heads of religious, moral, and social, and with statements of the means he has employed for punishing the same, and preventing their recurrence. The cases of children under three years old not to be included in the return.

## FIELD AND FLOOD.

The Peterborough Regatta took place on the 13th and 14th inst.

The "Metropolitan" took the first prize at the Cape May regatta on the 12th.

The Royal Canadian Yacht Club Race takes place at Toronto on Saturday, the 7th prox.

A regatta will be held at Charlottetown, P. E. I., during the second week in September.

A swimming festival took place recently at New York, in which six young ladies competed.

The Annual Matches of the New Brunswick Provincial Rifle Association are to be fired at Sussex, commencing on 3rd September.

The officers of the Halifax Garrison defeated the men of the Garrison at cricket on the 14th, by seventy-five runs; 51 was the biggest score.

The race at Utica on the 13th inst., for a purse of \$3,000 for horses that had never beaten 2.28 was won by "Crown Prince," time, 2.29½, 2.29½, and 2.30.

The Shamrocks of Montreal defeated the Toronto Lacrosse team on Saturday, taking three straight games. Time: 2m. 2½, and the third something over half-an-hour.

The Handicap Yacht race for a cup worth \$500, offered by Commodore Bennet, came off at Providence, R. I., on the 15th, and was won by Lester Wallack's yacht "Columbia."

The trotting race at Cleveland for \$10,000, between "Annie Watson," of Pittsburg, and "Belle Patterson," of Oil City, was won by the former in three straight heats; best time 2.35.

The return match of cricket between Madoc and Marmora clubs was played on the 14th, on the ground of the former, resulting in favour of Madoc by one run, with ten wickets to go down.

A boat-race was rowed on the 12th inst., in the harbour of St. John, between the "Globe" and "Telegraph"—the former rowed by two men and the latter by one. "The Globe" came in a hundred yards ahead.

The Ottawa Caledonian Games took place on the 13th inst., the Montreal Games on Saturday, the 17th, and the Toronto on Tuesday last. Dinnie and Fleming were present at all three places, and took several prizes.

The dates of the Toronto Fall Meeting have been changed to the 7th, 9th, and 10th of September. The Aurora meeting will be held on the 13th and 14th, and the Barrie meeting on the 18th, 19th and 20th of September.

A race took place at the Newmarket race-course, in London, on the 15th, between J. W. Smyth's "Lady Coote," and W. J. Thompson's "Melody," for a purse of \$100. "Melody" won the first two heats easily, and was declared the winner of the race.

On Saturday at the annual Lachine Regatta the four mile four-oared race was won by the "Charlotte" in 20m. 49s. The two-mile outrigger race was taken by Berry and Fleming of Toronto, the scull-race by Berry. There were also Indian canoe races, and punt races.

A cricket match was played at Grafton on the 15th between the Grafton and Whitley clubs. In the first innings Grafton scored 68, and Whitley 113; Grafton then went to the bat and scored 141 with 8 wickets down when time was called. The game was decided by the first innings.

A boat race between the London and St. Mary's crews took place on the 16th inst. The London men easily took the first two heats, coming in about four boats' lengths ahead. A sad accident occurred at the close of the race, caused by two runaway horses, by which several women and children were injured.

The St. John *Telegraph* of the 16th inst., says:—"The challenge quilt match of 40 points for \$25 a-side, came off at Torryburn yesterday, between Messrs. John McGowan & Richard McDonald, and Patrick Gorman & David McCarthy. The result was:—McGowan & McDonald, 40; Gorman & McCarthy, 15."

A cricket match was played on the 14th, between the Belleville Club and an eleven from the following places, viz: two from Montreal, two from Brighton, two from Grafton, one from Port Hope, and the remaining four from Colborne, resulting in favour of Colborne by 19 runs. Thirty-nine was the biggest score made by any one individual.

The following are the names of the Montreal twenty-two playing the eleven gentlemen of England:—Messrs. L. S. Benjamin, Bricknell, G. Campbell, F. Colson, F. Fourdrinier, Green, S. Harding, J. Harper, Jr., Henley, Holland, W. J. M. Jones, J. Laing, A. Laing, Liddell, W. McKenzie, McLean, Matthews, Mills, G. Murray, W. Smith and F. Tott.

The Guelph Maple Leaf Base Ball Club, the champions of Canada, who left on the 19th inst. for a tour in the United States, have been singularly unfortunate. On the 12th they played a game at Baltimore with the leading club in the city, and were beaten by a score of 25 to 9. On the 14th they were beaten by the Athletics, of Philadelphia, by 25 to 8. On the 15th they were again beaten by the Mutuals of New York. The game, however, seems to have been close and well-contested, as the score stood 9 to 4.

The Cup presented by Sir Peter Tait to the Militia of Canada, in commemoration of the visit of the Ontario team to Wimbledon in 1871, will be competed for at Toronto on the 17th September next, by ten members from any corps in the Dominion. Ranges 200, 500 and 600 yards. The cup to remain in the custody of the Lieut.-Governor of the Province of the winning corps for the time being, and to be competed for in the Provincial match of the Province holding the cup. Entries, which are free, must be forwarded to Lt.-Col. Scoble, Fort Erie, Ont., on or before the 1st of September next.

The Windsor Races took place on the 14th and 15th inst. The following is a summary. Trotting race for horses that never beat 3 m., taken by "Bay Prince," time, 2.58; five entries. Pacing Race for horses that never beat 2.34; three entries; taken by "Bald Face" in 2.43½. Trotting race for horses that never beat 2.42; four entries; "Brown Gelding" first; time, 2.54. Running Race; seven entries; taken by "Rufe Hunt" in 1.47½. Pacing Race for horses that never beat 3 m.; five entries; taken by "Billy Bluff," time, 2.47.

\* In this quotation, and throughout, I have taken the liberty of condensing—giving only the substance and the salient points.